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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

2 November 1971

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Oktoberfest at the UN (ONE Distribution Only)

NOTE TO THE BOARD

These are some random thoughts, inspired by the stirring events at the UN last week. There is no particular purpose to the piece, except to elicit comments and stimulate thought. No further distribution is planned.

[Redacted Signature]

Acting Chief, Estimates Staff

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SUBJECT: Oktoberfest at the UN

1. Last week's voting at the UN provided a high degree of emotional satisfaction to the winners, some sulking and re-criminations by the losers, and confusion generally about what it all means. In future years political science students will probably find this a choice topic for senior term papers. I wish them luck. From the point of view of this office there is little point in trying to fathom why this particular ill-fated policy was adopted, what larger purposes it served, or what would have been achieved had it succeeded. I think there is some value, though, in considering foreign responses to the US initiative, and likely reactions to the US setback, if that is what it is.

2. Certain facts are clear enough. For the US the glass building on the East River is no longer a comfortable club of

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largely like-minded or supple members. Indeed, it has not been that for a long time. In the decade from the mid-fifties to the mid-sixties decolonization produced scores of new members. Many of these viewed the UN as a forum for obscure, parochial issues, or as a corral for their own hobbyhorses. Sterile cold war themes sometimes gave way to the more flamboyant rhetoric of the non-aligned group. The non-aligned bloc was an irritant to the US, but not inevitably hostile. Moreover, as the non-aligned group expanded in number, its principal aims were diluted, and it failed to emerge as a collective identity.

3. In the days of expanding membership US influence held up fairly well. The US, drawing on its long record as a foe of colonialism, attracted the admiration, and even the gratitude of new national leaders in Africa and Asia. Even little-known chiefs of state from remote lands treasured a hand-shake from President Kennedy, and a chance to speak to the UN General Assembly. US bilateral economic and other aid helped to assure favorable votes in the UN. Latin Americans and NATO allies tended to follow US leadership, often because it coincided with their own interests. All of this served to perpetuate the illusion that the UN was an institution working in tandem with the US.

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4. Those days are gone forever. For a variety of reasons it has become increasingly difficult for the US to get favorable responses from the UN on contentious matters. For one thing, it is simply more arduous now to canvas 130-odd members than a couple of score before 1950. Also the lessening of cold war tensions, the emergence of highly emotional regional distractions (Arabs vs Israel, black Africans vs white southern Africans, India vs Pakistan), and the growing frustration of the world's poorer countries with the US and its wealthy friends have all contributed to the decline of US influence in the UN. US involvement in Vietnam has estranged a goodly number of former friends. In addition, the US no longer maintains the wide scope of foreign aid programs which once helped shore up diplomatic support. More recently, the import surcharge and the floating of the dollar have aroused widespread resentment. There is increasing uncertainty about US intentions, and less fear of US diplomatic and military power.

5. In these circumstances, it is surprising that US diplomatic efforts produced as many as 55 votes last week for our losing cause, the Chinese Representation resolution. Indeed, it took a massive diplomatic onslaught, a combination of arm-twisting,

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cajolery, and special pleading to do it. Among the 55 supporters were Japan, Indonesia, Australia, and the four largest Latin American states. Twenty-three of the states on our side have populations under three million, nine of them under a million. Only Luxembourg, Greece and Portugal of the NATO states joined the US.

6. The timing and the atmosphere were unfortunate for the US. With Henry Kissinger in Peking at the time of the vote, some UN members doubted that the US was sincere in defending the right of Nationalist China to a seat. Others dropped off, not wanting to be on what they saw as a losing side. Also the presence of most of America's closest allies on the other side of the issue confused many. Some were still smarting from recent unhappy encounters with the US (Peru, Ecuador) or felt that a vote against the US was a measure of asserting national independence (perhaps Guyana, Uganda, Kenya, and Trinidad).

7. Yet, in many respects this is hardly a fair measure of US support in the world, and the pitiful line-up at the great UN Oktoberfest should not be considered as a new listing of clients. Actually, many of the 55 states associated themselves with the US

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only with great reluctance. Japan, in particular, is reeling from the humiliation of yet another international blow. The dancing and jubilation, led by Tanzania, in the aisles of the General Assembly, did reflect a rejoicing that the mighty US had gotten its comeuppance. And in news media in many of the Third World countries in the following days the UN affair was treated as a vote of no confidence in US leadership.

8. In time the US setback will be forgotten. It was not really a major event, rather a symptom of changes going on in the world, or perhaps the end of a long period in which the US fairly easily dominated international events. There are serious considerations of foreign policy looming ahead in the 1970's of a somewhat different order from those of the past. The coming decade will see a proliferation of major conferences, in which the affairs of the recent past will be disposed of and new issues addressed. In 1972 alone scheduled conventions include: SALT, UNCTAD, monetary readjustments, world environment, Law of the Sea, and probably one on population control. There are also problems for the US in formulating and adjusting to new relations with China, the USSR, Japan, and the expanded EEC.

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9. We do not, for example, have any very clear idea of how China is going to behave in major world councils. The emergence of China as a participant will probably have a considerable effect on Third World countries. There will certainly be many more exchanges of diplomatic representation with Peking, flocks of aid-seekers winging their way to China, and probably considerable susceptibility by Third World countries to blandishments of the Chinese.

10. The US for its part, faces a great challenge, and perhaps a great opportunity. Many of the old constraints on US policy are being stripped away. We don't have to fawn over unpleasant foreign regimes, if their votes are not important to us. We do have to give serious thought to those foreign countries important enough to do some damage to US interests. The probable early wind-down of US involvement in Vietnam will remove a big obstacle in our relations with many Third World states. This, and other actions which appear to some of our client states as a kind of neo-isolationism, will cause considerable concern in some capitals. Yet, over time, the US may come to feel that it does not need to support a number of repressive authoritarian regimes.

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US relationships with Third World states are likely to be based less on patron-client lines than on economic and perhaps cultural exchanges.

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